

Rifling About

—Travis L. Martin

The night never ends
For children of the
Cumberland Valley,
Whose souls, wrapped
In the Holy Ghost,
Forever rifle about within
For blame: once saved
Always saved, unless—
The paradox begins again.

What happens when
The blue morning dew
Evaporates
Like crabgrass raptured
By a sweet grandmother
Planting spring tomatoes,
Revealing the disgusting earth
And the dark limestone caverns
Underneath?

What happens when
Blessed assurance
In the soulless gaze
Of the Black Angus

Is held accountable,
Locking eyes
With a broken old farmer,
Begging forgiveness
At the stockyard.

What happens when
The water moccasin's
Warning—
That sickly-sweet watermelon scent—
Oozes from your pores
Like the sweat of ecstasy
Or eternal damnation?

The sun rises,
As it always does,
And the valley
Forgets the night,
Cleansing the souls
Of those left behind
In murky-green waters,
Calling its children
Back to the altar
To hear a sermon
About the night
Steadily approaching.